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ABSTRACT

While the concept of the teaching portfolio is variously defined, portfolios generally provide the opportunity to display teaching abilities and accomplishments, as well as reflect on one's teaching. In using teaching portfolios, the departmental chairperson must create a climate in which faculty understand that putting together a portfolio will not put them in jeopardy and will bear fruit. Creating this climate involves five steps. Chairpersons must surrender some of their control over the evaluation process to allow faculty to create their portfolios; guide the department in appropriately defining good teaching; reassure faculty regarding concerns over potential misuse of the portfolio or time to compile one; create an atmosphere of collegiality; and provide faculty with assistance on such issues as teaching strategies, and learning theory, as well as on how to develop a portfolio. The only essential element of a portfolio is a statement of the teacher's philosophy of education. Other suggested sections include a statement of general goals for courses; a discussion of the connection between teaching strategies and individual beliefs about learning; reflections on how teaching effectiveness may be determined; and documentation of the individual's effectiveness, often including a personal journal. Finally, portfolios may be used for professional development, such as contract renewal, tenure merit pay, and promotion, as well as for self-reflection. Includes 11 references. (ECC)

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THE TEACHING PORTFOLIO:

THE DEPARTMENT CHAIRPERSON'S ROLE IN CREATING A CLIMATE OF TEACHING EXCELLENCE

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The teaching portfolio:
The department chairperson's role
in creating a climate of teaching excellence

Providing a concrete definition of the teaching portfolio is not only difficult, but also somewhat self-defeating. The enchantment of the teaching portfolio arises largely out of the flexibility it provides faculty. A portfolio becomes an intensely personal document and takes on the character of the owner. Thus, only abstract definitions are possible.

Urbach (1992) defined the teaching portfolio in terms of its intended outcome. "The goal of a teaching portfolio is to describe, through documentation over an extended period of time, the full range of your abilities as a college teacher" (p. 71). According to O'Neill and Wright (1992) "the Teaching Dossier [portfolio] is a comprehensive record of teaching activities and accomplishments drawn up by the professor" (p. 6). Seldin and Annis (1990) provide a definition from the institutional perspective. "The portfolio, which is a collection of materials documenting teaching performance, is a useful way to underscore teaching as an institutional priority..." (p. 197).

For the teaching practitioner, what does all this mean? Fundamentally, teaching portfolios provide a professor with the opportunity to display her/his teaching abilities and accomplishments. "However, simply documenting one's teaching would neither justify the effort required to put a portfolio together nor unleash its potential to improve one's teaching. A teaching portfolio is a collection of documents that represent the best of one's teaching and provides one with the occasion to reflect on his/her teaching with the same intensity professors devote to their research" (Murray, 1994). The power of a portfolio is found in its ability to become a tool for an individual to reflect on the real task of education--teaching. The most important outcome from a teaching portfolio is self-reflection. However, portfolios reap benefits only when the departmental climate allows them to flourish.

The departmental climate and the teaching portfolio

Faculty need to be convinced that by assembling a teaching portfolio they will not place themselves in jeopardy and that their efforts will bear fruit. It becomes the responsibility of the chairperson to create a climate where faculty are convinced that these conditions exist.

Chairpersons need to examine the reward structure within the institution and the department. They need to provide prominence to the rewards for good teaching and they need to demonstrate that they will address poor teaching. Much of the recent criticism of higher education centers around our inability to

deal with poor teaching. Although community colleges often claim superiority in this regard a recent study (Murray, in press) of community colleges in Ohio and New York found that most chief academic officers believe that poor teaching is overlooked. Moreover, the same study revealed that there are few rewards for excellence in teaching. A study of four-year institutions revealed that the amount of time spent teaching or in contact with students was inversely proportional to salary (NCTLA, 1993, p. 1).

Chairperson's will need to scrutinize the reward structures available for their use and find innovative ways to reward faculty who take seriously the task of examining their teaching. However, the task of creating a climate where teaching is valued and, at the same time, innovation and risk-taking are encouraged can be quite challenging for a chairperson. Teachers who conscientiously compile a portfolio risk revealing their foibles along with their fortes. It becomes imperative that chairpersons create a climate where faculty feel free to risk failure as well as celebrate their success. Chairpersons must recognize earnest efforts at improvement without, however, encouraging incessant ineptitude. Creating this climate means walking a narrow line. Walking this line involves at least five steps.

Step 1: Chairpersons must be willing to surrender some of their control over the evaluation process to the individual faulty member and her/his colleagues. Part of the promise of portfolios rests in the potential individuality of the product. Such individuality comes from the ability of the faculty member to define how she/he wishes to present his/her teaching accomplishments for review by others. Chairpersons may have extreme difficulty surrendering this control. They may fear that faculty will be able to cover-up poor teaching with slick presentations. Most (see Seldin, 1992) who have worked with portfolio projects realize that it is impossible to provide sustained evidence of good teaching unless good teaching exists. Other chairs may fear that dissimilar portfolios will make it difficult to compare one teaching performance to another. Admittedly, this may be an outcome of a teaching portfolio project. However, the difficulty can be considerably mitigated, if not eliminated, by departments that have take the time to define good teaching.

Step 2: Higher education often seems to sidestep the difficult task of defining good teaching. The instruments in use often address the aspects of teaching that are easily observed. Often the cha cteristics measured are those that any job or profession might refer to as good work habits--showing up on time, performing work (returning graded assignment) in a timely manner, staying for the full work day, and so on. While most would agree that such behaviors are necessary conditions for good teaching, they are hardly sufficient conditions. "What's missing in such an evaluation are precisely those aspects

of teaching that *faculty* are uniquely qualified to observe and judge" (Edgerton, Hutchings, and Quinlan, 1991, p. 5).

Any attempt to define good teaching must begin with the recognition that "instructional methods and content are discipline-specific, making absolute comparisons both impossible and inappropriate" (O'Neil and Wright, 1992, p. 6). This means that departments must take the time to agree on the characteristics of good teaching. Chairpersons need to guide, without coercing, faculty in this process. Without a departmental definition of good teaching, faculty cannot compile meaningful portfolios.

Step 3: Before chairpersons can institute a portfolio project, many will need to allay the natural suspicions of faculty. Many faculty may harbor suspicions about any evaluation technique. Others may worry about the time developing a portfolio might take. While worry over the potential abuse of any evaluation technique could be justifiable at some colleges, concern over the time developing a portfolio appears unfounded. "From the experience of hundreds of faculty at a growing number of colleges and universities we know that preparing a portfolio does not consume an unreasonable amount of time. In fact it takes no more than a few days to put together" (Seldin, 1992, p. 15).

Concern over the potential misuse of self-reflective evaluative documents cannot be dismissed. Some chairpersons will abuse faculty who honestly reflect on their weaknesses. If you are in such a department, you would be wise to resist developing a portfolio. Such departments need to take steps to heal themselves when trust has been destroyed. Here an administrative portfolio might be of much greater use than a teaching portfolio.

In departments where such distrust does not exist, chairs can overcome any initial suspicions by working with faculty to define good teaching and defining the rewards that will flow from good teaching. However, the key to overcoming initial suspicions is to create an atmosphere of collegial collaboration, solidarity, and equality.

Step 4: Chairpersons need to create an atmosphere of collegiality. "In practice, the well knit portfolio usually represents collegial efforts. Most people need help from some 'other'--a teaching improvement specialist, a faculty colleague, or a department chair--to structure the portfolio and decide what goes in it" (Seldin & Annis, 1990, p. 198). At many steps along the way, faculty will need the assistance of a "colleague". Someone who they can share their ideas, fears, successes and failures, and someone who can offer suggestions and collaborate with them. This person needs to be a colleague in the sense of an associate or a fellow traveler. A colleague is one who assists, not one who judges.

Step 5: Chairpersons must provide their faculty with the means to succeed. For many this will mean providing faculty with the opportunity to learn more about what goes into a portfolio. For some faculty this may also mean learning more about teaching and learning processes.

Departmental faculty, no matter how excellent their teaching, will need some assistance to learn more about teaching strategies, learning theory, and so on. This may mean that chairs will need to work closely with the faculty development person (if you have one). Moreover, it may mean that the chair will have to develop her/his own knowledge of pedagogy. Chairpersons who have developed a sense of departmental collegiality will be able to tap the resources of other departmental members.

For a teaching portfolio project to succeed, faculty will need some guidance on how to compile a portfolio. In part, these decisions should be developed by departmental or college-wide consensus. Most faculty outside the fine arts have little or no concept of how to design and compile a portfolio. Chairs will need to devise ways to provide faculty with the means to learn these techniques. One excellent way is to schedule workshops for faculty. Eison (1993) outlines a strategy for promoting teaching portfolio development through workshops. Another excellent way is to work with one or two of your best teachers to develop portfolios that others can model.

What goes into a teaching portfolio

Because "the teaching portfolio is a technology yet to be invented..." (Edgerton, Hutchings, & Quinlan, 1991, p. 6), defining the archetypical is impossible. The emergent nature of teaching portfolios is an advantage, however. Teaching portfolios accord the opportunity to chronicle "both the complexity and individuality of good teaching" (Seldin, 1991, xi). Nonetheless, it is important for departments to agree on an overall structure of what a portfolio should contain. Indeed, there are certain categories,that when include, will make portfolios more useful to the teacher and chairperson.

Before deciding what goes into a portfolio two important questions must be answered. First we must decide how the portfolio is going to be used. A portfolio designed to stimulate reflection on one's teaching will undoubtedly look different from one developed to earn tenure or merit pay. Although I favor using teaching portfolios for faculty renewal, powerful arguments have been made by Seldin (1991) and Edgerton, Hutchings, and Quinlan (1991) for the use of portfolios in the evaluation, promotion and tenure arenas. I fear, however, that when portfolios are used for personnel decisions, the portfolio owner will be penalized for honest reflection on perceived weaknesses. In most personnel procedures, faculty need to emulate

their students and attempt to hide their weaknesses from the judgmental authorities. This quandary might be easily solved if we acknowledge that different types of portfolios for different purposes are equally legitimate. A junior faculty member preparing a portfolio for review by a tenure committee might design a portfolio that looks quite different from one designed by a faculty member who is simply interested in taking a hard look at his/her teaching.

The second question deals with what should go into a portfolio. "While there is no shortage of information about the kinds of materials which could be included in teaching dossier [portfolios], very few professors have experience in deciding what should go into their dossiers" (O'Neil and Wright, 1992, p. 4). Fundamentally, the questions revolve around whether the portfolio should be a collection of artifacts or reflections and whether the portfolio should represent all or only the best work of an individual.

It would be misleading to suggest that a portfolio could not be a collection of both artifacts of teaching and reflections on teaching. A mere collection of artifacts runs the danger of becoming "a thick an unwieldy collection of documents and materials that would be indecipherable to anyone other than its owner" (Wolf, 1991, p.131). However, on the other hand a collection of reflections on teaching risks turning into a sterile academic exercise that favors those skilled at slick presentations of slim products. A useful portfolio would more likely emerge from a marriage of artifacts generated in the teaching process and reflections on how the artifacts reflect the educational convictions of the portfolio's owner. Thus, the portfolio becomes "a culture of professional inquiry about good teaching" (Edgerton, Hutchings, & Quinlan, 1991, p. 6).

The second part of this question deals with whether the portfolio should represent the best or all of the teacher's work. Although this question is deceptive, clearly a portfolio containing all of an individual's work would be a tangled, uninformative web. Thus, the portfolio must be selective. However, the question of whether it should contain only examples of a professor's best work cannot be answered without knowing how the portfolio will be used. A portfolio intended to impress a promotion and tenure committee needs to carefully present the best of one's work. A portfolio intended to improve teaching may contain artifacts and reflections on problems one discovers in her/his teaching.

Step by step construction of the portfolio

The content of a portfolio should be different for everyone who assembles one. Moreover, there are numerous lists of what one might include

in a portfolio (Seldin, 1991; Edgerton, Hutchings, and Quinlan, 1991; Wolf, 1991). All I want to suggest here are a few general categories that I believe are necessary components of a teaching portfolio.

Maybe the only essential ingredient for a successful teaching portfolio is a statement of the owner's philosophy of education. In order to reflect on your teaching, you need to reflect on your assumptions about the teaching and learning processes. You need to confront several bedrock assumptions about what you believe regarding the learning and teaching process. Some (but certainly not all) of the assumptions you will need to deal with are the following:

- beliefs about who can and who should benefit from a college education.
- beliefs about the function of higher-education in our society; is it to train or educate?
- beliefs about how people learn.
- beliefs about the best way to teach and if you can or even want to adjust your teaching style to accommodate diverse learning styles.
- beliefs about your discipline and its importance in your students' future.

For me, the quintessential components of the philosophical statements involve reflection on values and the humanness of our enterprise. Yet, putting one's philosophy of education into words should be a highly personal undertaking. Nonetheless, it can also be risky. Writing one's basic beliefs can expose those whose philosophy is incongruent with their teaching practices, the mission of their institution, or the philosophies of their teaching colleagues.

Other than a statement of educational philosophy, the content of the portfolio should be determined by its intended use. The following categories are meant to be suggestions only.

A statement of the teacher's general goals for his/her course(s) and how these blend with the professor's philosophical assumptions might help a reader. For example if your goal is to reduce students' anxiety over studying philosophy, you would probably select different readings than if your goal was to have students understand how Plato and Aristotle shaped the course of Western intellectual history. For most, the goals will be connected to the specific course, the demands of the discipline, the connection of the course to the overall curriculum, and hopefully, the needs of the students. All of these impinge on how and what you teach. They also impinge (or should) on how your effectiveness is gauged.

Another section of the portfolio might be usefully devoted to a discussion of how the teaching strategies match one's philosophical assumptions about learning. This section would also discuss how the selected strategies match the goals of the course and its students.

Next, a teaching portfolio might contain a section on how teaching effectiveness is best determined. Such a section should include a discussion of the demands of the discipline and those local circumstances that influence decisions about learning outcomes. Assessing effectiveness includes many components. How do you judge whether students learned what you expected they would learn? How do you evaluate your teaching performance. Both are complicated. Both require knowledge with which many college teachers have only a vague acquaintance. In such instances a portfolio might contain a plan for developing the requisite knowledge. Colleges encouraging teachers to complete portfolios need to understand that colleges need to commit resources and resourceful teaching specialists if portfolios are expected to impact teaching. Otherwise, the exercise becomes a sterile collection of waste paper.

The substance of a teaching portfolio, of course, is the documentation of and reflection on teaching effectiveness. The content of this section must be determined by the portfolio owner. However, a portfolio should use multiple sources and types of data. In general four types of information could be used to document effectiveness--actual artifacts produced in the process of teaching, outcome documentation, quantitative and qualitative data. In my opinion, however, it is imperative to understand that no data will substitute for reflection. A portfolio containing only documentation without reflection is simply a receptacle for disposable paper. Also the documentation contained in a portfolio should be selective and representative. A portfolio need not contain everything produced for or by a particular class. Rather it should contain examples selected because they represent an individual's beliefs about how learning takes place, what strategies are effective in reaching the selected goals, and how the effectiveness of this course, this teacher, and these students are best assessed.

Seldin (1991, p. 15) suggests that a portfolio might contain a reflective log. Although finding time to make entries in a reflective log can be difficult for the overworked professor, a reflective log can unlock the real value of a portfolio. A reflective log, recording the immediate impressions, thoughts on a specific class, disappointments, and thrills can certainly provide its owner with copious insights into her/his teaching. However, its real value is in the process not the product. Taking time to record one's thoughts occasions reflection on how one's behavior matches one's beliefs as well as the appropriateness of those beliefs. One caution, however, is necessary. A reflective log ought to be a very personal document and should never be shared with anyone evaluating the portfolio. It should be kept separate from the portfolio and administrators must never violate the owner (even if the owner agrees) by asking for its inclusion in a public portfolio.

The exercise of putting together a portfolio can hardly be justified if it

does not result in personal and professional renewal of the owner. Therefore, another component of a portfolio could be a plan for professional development. The last entry in a portfolio could be a plan for how you are going to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes that you have determined you want to gain after you have reflected on what you have learned from the process of developing a portfolio. Such a meditation is the reflection of a caring, dedicated professional teacher. Rather than an admission of deficiencies, it is an expression of strength and renewal.

Uses for Teaching Portfolios

Although portfolios have many uses the two primary purposes touted by the literature are: "(1) to gather and present hard evidence and specific data about teaching effectiveness for those who judge performance; and/or (2) to provide the needed structure for self-reflection about which areas of teaching performance need improvement" (Seldin, 1991, p. 3). Quite obviously, I have been pushing the second, but portfolios can and should be used (with carefully considered guidelines) for contract renewal, tenure merit pay, and promotion decisions.

The fear that I have concerns the tendency we academics have to turn everything into either an academic exercise or a procrustean bed. If teaching portfolios become academic exercises intended to impress our colleagues, they may lose the potential value they have for our students. If they become procrustean beds (like so many promotion and tenure policies seem to do), teaching portfolios may lose the value they have for us--the teachers. I believe that the tool of teaching portfolios possesses great instrumental value. However, tools can be used to produce magnificent artifacts or ugly edifices. Only time will tell which we will produce with this tool.

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